

HARTFORD, CONN.
COURANT

Approved For Release 2004/01/16 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000500340039-1
MORNING 114,108
SUNDAY 155,682

JAN 28 1963

Confusion over Cuba

Since the briefing session was held behind closed doors, exactly what's going on and Central Intelligence Agency head John McCone told Senator Wayne Morse's subcommittee on Latin-American affairs about the newly reported arms buildup in Cuba will probably remain undisclosed. But it is apparent that those who heard the discussion have come away with divided impressions and that the general public will therefore feel no more enlightened.

Between the time the meeting was called and its taking place, President Kennedy told a press conference that daily surveillance has convinced him there has been no influx of military equipment into Cuba of late. Though some 17,000 Russians are manning or helping construct military sites there, the President said he did not feel the situation poses an offensive threat to this country's security. And State Department officials have classified the operations in Cuba as defensive.

The story that touched off Senator Morse's concern was a New York Times account of round-the-clock construction of "highly sophisticated" ground and air military systems in Cuba; of work from which even Cubans were barred by the Russians; and of large arms shipments. The report however did classify both work and equipment as defensive.

Senator Morse emerged from the briefing saying he now supported the view expressed by President Kennedy. So did some of the others who attended. But it appears there are perhaps as many other Senators who continue dubious, who think the situation in Cuba highly dangerous, and who want further evidence pro or con.

In the face of all this, the public can only conjecture. One guess would be that President Kennedy, who during the missile crisis in Cuba in October was ready to take this country right into nuclear war if necessary to get Soviet offensive weapons out of Cuba, would hardly be unperturbed now if the same threat were being posed all over again. The contrast between his firm action earlier and his more relaxed reaction at the moment would seem too extreme unless he really knows — or at least believes — that what is going on in Cuba now is purely defensive, which is what he says. True, the buildup certainly would make things tougher if the United States finds eventual cause to invade Cuba—and of course such a possibility has not been written off. But as for the moment, it somehow does not seem likely that anyone so strong as the President was three months ago would do a turnaround to being lackadaisical now.

Dissidents of course can retort "Who knows?" And there is always the fact that defensive weapons can be a two-edged sword — some of them can be used for attack also, like the fighter plane that can carry nuclear bombs. One thing is clear. The Russians are determined to turn Cuba into a fortress, for whatever purpose and certainly no good one. However things are now, it is obvious that the utmost surveillance of

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now. As Senator Morse implied, we shall also have to be ready to do anything else that may be required for the security of the Western Hemisphere.